IN MEMORIAM E. D. VAN OORT
1876—1933

On September 21st last Professor Dr. E. D. van Oort died at Leiden rather suddenly. For a considerable time his health had, indeed, been indifferent; on frequent occasions he had been unwell for shorter or longer periods, and in the spring of this year he was even obliged to apply for a four months' leave of absence. When after the expiry of this period, apparently recovered, he resumed his work, be it only for a few hours daily, we fostered the hope to have him among us for many years to come. Fate, however, decided differently. On Thursday morning he came to the museum, feeling better than on the previous days; he received the visitors cheerfully, and left the building past noon. Three hours later death had overtaken him.

Eduard Daniel van Oort was born at Barneveld on October 31st, 1876. Already in early boyhood he felt drawn to nature, and spent a great part of his leisure-hours, nay even occasionally of his schoolhours, in the open, watching the animals, and especially the birds, in their natural surroundings.

His teacher in biology at the Secondary School at the Hague, the late Dr. Ed. Everts, the well-known coleopterist, stimulated his love to the animal world, leading it into the right channels and assisting him with advice and help in forming his collections. This once roused interest determined his career. In 1895 he went to the University at Leiden, where he studied botany and under Professor Hoffmann zoology. Afterwards he was for some years (1900—1904) assistant of Professor K. Martin, director of the "Rijks Geologisch-mineralogisch Museum" (National Geological and Mineralogical Museum). He arranged there i. a. the collections of fossil molluscs and published several papers on paleontological subjects. The daily intercourse with the great paleontologist Professor Martin, his way of managing the museum, his activity and love of order had a great influence on Van Oort's training as a systematist and a museum-manager. He took his degree of doctor of philosophy at Bern (March 1904), "magna cum laude" under Professor Th. Studer; his thesis was entitled "Beitrag zur Osteologie des Vogelschwanzes". In the same year (May 1904) he was appointed curator of "'s Rijks Museum van Natuurlijke Historie" (the National Museum of Natural History), of which he became the director in 1915. In 1920 Van Oort was appointed professor of zoology at the University at Leiden. Although the subject-

matter of his lectures was not required for the examinations, these lectures were well-attended, for the difficult subject as the systematics of birds and mammals was dealt with by him in such a way as to hold the attention of his audience.

In Van Oort we have lost a systematist of the old stamp, a skilful ornithologist, a man who had acquired his profound knowledge of the birds and their eggs not only by studying the material in the museum, but largely by watching the birds in nature. The problem of the migration of birds was to him one of absorbing interest. When entering upon his duties as a professor (December 1st, 1920), his inaugural address had for its subject "De vogeltrek en zijn tegenwoordig experimenteel onderzoek" (The migration of birds and the present position of its experimental research). He was the first in Holland to apply the method of providing birds with rings in order to gather data regarding the ways, taken by birds on their migrations. This research, started as early as 1911, expanded constantly, involving an enormous amount of correspondence and administration. The "Ringstation Wassenaar" and the "Vogeltrek-station Texel" were established with his support.

Besides his numerous contributions in the field of systematic ornithology in Dutch and foreign periodicals, his standard-work on the birds of Holland "Ornithologia Neerlandica", in five volumes, deserves special mention; in this work he gives an extensive description, based on personal observation, of the habitus, distribution and manner of living of all birds that live in this country or that have been occasionally observed. It is to be regretted that death has prevented him from completing this work and from carrying out his plan to write a similar treatise on the mammals of Holland, for besides being in charge of the section for birds, he was also curator of the section for mammals, of which he also possessed an extensive knowledge.

He took a special interest in whales, and when a rare Cetacean was washed ashore, he always tried to obtain it for the museum in an undamaged condition, and great was his satisfaction, when his exertions were crowned with success.

He was not only versed in the knowledge of those animals of which a section was under his charge, but also in the remaining field of systematical zoology; he had a very good knowledge of the Carabini and the Lycaenidae, while he might claim to be a specialist for humble-bees.

As a delegate he attended several zoological congresses; that his work was valued not only in Holland but also abroad appears from his being i.a. an honorary member of the "American Ornithologists' Union" and a corresponding member of the "Zoological Society of London".

As director, Van Oort has always devoted his best efforts to making the National Museum of Natural History an institution that should rank equally among the museums throughout the world. He advocated the true standpoint that there was not a museum for the sake of the curators, but that there were curators for the sake of the museum. He was always ready to stand up for the institution whose interests he had so much at heart and to defend its rights and independence, for he considered the Museum rather a central institution for the whole country than an establishment connected with the University at Leiden. Under his directorate the collections have considerably increased in size and in scientific value. Many persons have bequeathed their collections to his museum, knowing that these would be in safe custody in his hands. His fervent wish was to complete the Museum by adding exhibition-rooms and also rooms to accomodate the osteological collections that are now distributed in many different parts of the building. In his opinion a museum without an exhibition for the public could only partly answer its purpose. Unfortunately his wish for such an extension of the Museum has not been fulfilled.

Notwithstanding the numerous worries which the management of such a large institution entails, he was always ready to assist by word and deed whoever applied to him for informations or help, be it a student or a scientific research worker. Owing to his extensive knowledge of animals, his profound reading and his never failing memory, assisted by a right insight and a dispassionate judgment, those who appealed to him were seldom dismissed empty-handed. The Government, too, highly appreciated his advice and appointed him a member of several royal commissions.

At first sight Van Oort might seem somewhat cool and reserved, but those who were more intimately acquainted with him knew that his heart beat warmly for his fellow-men and that he was very susceptible. Notwithstanding his great knowledge he was extremely modest. He was just, and honest to a fault, which has caused him many disagreeables.

May his work as a scientific research worker and as a museum-manager be continued in such a way as to fulfil the high requirements that the work of this accurate and conscientious scholar has always come up to.

CH. BAYER.



Prof. Dr. E. D. VAN OORT †
1876—1933.